

all for one and one for all by jewishhelenarobles

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Summary:

“Dart?” Dustin asked. “Is that you? I’ve got your favorite.” He waved the Three Musketeers in front of the demogorgon’s face opening. “Mm-mm. Nougat.”

The thing lifted its head and wolfed down the candy bar. Sated, it rubbed itself against Dustin like a happy cat.

“Uh, okay,” said Lucas. “What do we do now?”

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Dustin was having a bad day.

It had started when he walked into Geography without his homework and had to waste valuable class time in the office calling his mom, who of course wasn't in the house and couldn't bring it to him, and he had to walk back into class shamefaced to accept the partial credit. It hadn't let up when Jason Pritchett grabbed his backpack at lunch for a "joke" and he had to get rescued by Max, or when El got into one of her moods and ditched school without even telling Mike where she'd gone. It had pretty much hit its peak when the snow that was forecasted for the end of the week turned out to be not quite as likely as the weatherman had thought, and everyone's hopes for a snow day were dashed. It was true, the time he thought El was dead was probably worse, but this day was definitely up there on Dustin's list of Worst Days Ever.

I wish I was somebody else, Dustin thought, heaving his backpack onto the chair. It still had schmutz on it from getting into Jason Pritchett's lunch tray. If he could be anybody in the universe, he knew who it'd be: Han Solo from Star Wars. Sure, he wasn't the main-est main character, but he was way cooler than Luke, and he got the girl. Nothing ever fazed Han. He could figure a way out of anything, and honestly? He totally shot first.

Dustin was picturing himself on Hoth cutting open the tauntaun when he realized that his room was pretty cold itself. Not just cold -- a wind was blowing. Was the window open? No, it was --

"Shit," said Dustin.

The demogorgon on his bed lifted its head and blasted at him. It scampered (was scampered the word? clambered? crawled?) out of the wreck of Dustin's window.

"Shit," said Dustin again. "This can't be good."

“So, not to repeat myself, but there’s a live demogorgon in Hawkins?” asked Lucas. He was sitting on the chair, since the bed was still full of glass despite his and Dustin’s best efforts. El was still AWOL and Mike was looking for her and Will was at the doctor’s office and Max had some family thing she had to go to, so Lucas was the only one in the party to answer Dustin’s walkie-talkie. Still, though, Lucas was better than nothing. Lucas was better than a whole lot of things, in fact.

“Yeah,” said Dustin. “There must have been some that survived after El closed the rift.”

“But what about the --”

“-- hivemind?” said Dustin. “I don’t get it either. Maybe they were at least a little autonomous, or at least this one was, and it’s confused.”

“That doesn’t explain why it’s still alive,” said Lucas. “I thought closing the gate killed them all. Maybe --”

“Shh,” said Dustin. He grabbed Lucas’ arm. Lucas followed his eyes to the tarp they’d put up over the hole in the window. There was a big, ominous, demogorgon-shaped shadow over it, and it was scratching away at the fabric.

Dustin grabbed for his bat. Lucas reached into his pants pocket for his slingshot. The demogorgon burst through the tarp, jumped down from the bed, and blasted its face open.

Then it curled up on top of Dustin’s feet.

“What’s it,” said Lucas, after about thirty seconds of nothing happening. “What’s it... doing?”

“I don’t know,” Dustin breathed. “I don’t really... want to move right now.”

“That’s fair,” Lucas whispered.

Dustin had an idea. An awesome, terrible, crazy idea. “Lucas?” he said. “Do you have a Three Musketeers?”

Lucas’ eyes widened. “You think this is Dart?”

“Can’t hurt to find out,” said Dustin.

Lucas didn’t have a Three Musketeers, but he did find one in Dustin’s backpack. It was a little mashed up, but if Dustin was right, it would still work. Dustin peeled off the wrapper and crouched down to the demogorgon’s level.

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They decided not to tell Hop or Joyce. Dart seemed happy with Dustin, and there was a pretty good chance the adults would go ballistic if they found out he was still alive, which would probably make Dart scared and angry. And Dustin definitely didn’t want to make him angry, even if he seemed pretty content and peaceful right now. The hole in Dustin’s wall was easily explained away and covered over, but a hole in his face? Not so much.

Anyway, he was fairly easy to take care of. All he needed was raw meat and someplace cold to sleep, and Hawkins in February was plenty cold. Dustin was burning through his allowance buying frozen hamburger at the supermarket, but it beat having a hungry Dart on his property.

Sometimes when Dustin was doing his homework he would see Dart at the window and open it to let him in. Dart liked to curl up next to Dustin and bring him icicles, which Mike guessed was his way of keeping him cold. He always hung his head when he had to go back out the window for the night. He still loved nougat best, but he’d added Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups to his eating oeuvre.

He liked to play, too. His favorite thing to do was chase after filled bags of dirty snow or shredded paper and maul them to death with

his teeth. At first, Will was the only person who'd do it with Dustin, but Max and El quickly joined in, and Mike followed El, and then finally, reluctantly, Lucas started as well. He didn't come often, but Dustin liked seeing him out in the backyard, hurling a snow bag with all his might and smiling hesitantly when Dart came bounding back. It was good for him to have fun sometimes, Dustin thought; he had always been so serious, even when they were small.

One time, when his mom was away on a business trip and thought he was at Mike's, Dustin let Dart sleep in his room. When he woke up, crying, from a dream about Will being possessed again, it was weirdly kind of comforting to see him at the foot of his bed.

"You guys do know," said Steve, for the million and first time, "that it is absolutely batshit crazy to keep that monster at your house. It is not a dog. It could literally kill you."

"Sure, Steve," said Max from the back of the car. "How far is this drive, anyway? It didn't seem like such a long walk the last time I was here."

"Shut the fuck up, okay?" Steve snapped. "It's slushy out and I'm driving carefully. I'm being careful. Which all of you little morons should try sometime."

"We are being careful," said Mike, patiently. "We need to keep an eye on him to monitor his behavior. He keeps coming out here, so we need to figure out why."

"Sure," Steve scoffed. "That sounds like a really great idea. Just dive headfirst into danger without a plan at all."

"We have a plan," said Mike. "It's to --"

"Here," said El, cutting through their argument with her gravelly voice. Steve rolled to a halt.

"Okay, little Einsteins, get behind me," he grumbled, pulling the revolver El had stolen from Hop's house out of the glove compartment. He swung the door open and the party followed, out

into the frozen wasteland that was the Hawkins scrap yard.

The place was covered in mounds as far as the eye could see. Next to each mound was a hole exactly the diameter of Dart's shoulders. Dart himself was curled up asleep in an open fridge, but he bounded over happily when he smelled the party. Surprisingly, he ran right into Lucas' legs, weaving in and out of them to the tune of Lucas' surprised laughter.

"Hey, Dustin, my man," said Steve.

"Yeah?" said Dustin. "What is it?"

"Just wanted to talk to you," Steve replied.

"About Dart?" Dustin asked. "Seriously, we're being as careful as we possibly --"

"No, not about Dart," said Steve. He looked cagey. Then again, Steve always looked cagey, or sheepish, or some combination of the two, so it might be nothing serious.

"Then what?" Dustin said. Steve wasn't great at spitting things out, which got real annoying real fast.

"Just..." He held the silence for a few moments longer than was socially acceptable, then turned away and mumbled, "Sorry about the Snow Ball. You know, the hair thing. I thought it would help and I guess it didn't. Nancy told me about it."

"Hey, it's cool," said Dustin.

"Really?" said Steve, looking up from his shoes. His expression had morphed from cagey to forlorn. "You're not shitting me? 'Cause, like... I actually do care about you, dude. I wasn't trying to make you look like a fool, I swear."

"I'm serious," said Dustin. He looked over at Lucas, who was being pulled out of the snow by a giggling Max, and Mike and Will, who were watching El mind-throw pieces of scrap metal for Dart to catch. "It's fine."

Steve looked relieved, then snapped back into babysitter mode. "Okay, then, go play with your demon dog thing. I'll be on hand to shoot it if it tries to take your arm off."

"Thanks, Steve," said Dustin.

"It's no skin off mine," said Steve, "I'd do it for any one of you --"

"No," said Dustin. "For everything."

School was weird. School was always going to be weird, but it was especially weird now that there was a five-foot monster to think about when he should be doing work. Strangely, though, some of the weirdness from before seemed to be... going away.

He was never going to be as cool as Han Solo, at least not to the mouth breathers at Hawkins Middle, but being around El and Max all the time was starting to drive away the worst of the bullies. Plus, people saw him hanging around with Steve Harrington, and that was a major boost to his social status. One of the girls he'd asked out at the Snow Ball even apologized for being rude that night and asked if he wanted to go see a movie sometime. Dustin still didn't really know what had possessed him to politely let her down.

Oh, well. Dating wasn't always all it was cracked up to be, which he knew from experience with Mike and El's many, many fights. And he had the AV Club to think about, and school, and what if Will had a conniption again? Dart was still digging in inappropriate places, too, which he needed to figure out a way to fix. He had so many things on his plate, he wouldn't have time.

He thought maybe he'd build a shelter for Dart to live in, to keep cool in the summertime. He thought maybe he'd invite Lucas to help. Dustin barely ever got him to himself anymore, which was the one downside to having Max around.

He was a little worried, still, about the monster coming back. He thought they all were. Right now, though, he was just going to take what he could get.

And if he still woke up crying sometimes, well, he had Dart to keep him safe. With Dart by his side, Dustin was pretty sure he could face down anything.

Author's Note:

This was such an underutilized plotline in the show I decided to do the Duffer brothers' work for them and write the D'artagnan-as-pet scenario we all needed